

Democracy, Good Governance and
Political Misconduct; One Does Not Belong

Anambra State

October 17, 2006

By Consul General
Brian L. Browne

~~I have been looking forward to coming to~~
Anambra State for some time. Thank you for the
hospitality and the warmth of your greeting. You have
made me feel welcome. Although many of you I have
just met, I feel very comfortable here as if we have
known each other previously (or as if we are
acquaintances).

It is because I feel at home, because I feel I am
with friends that I will speak as if among friends.
Now, imagine you were driving home when you
sighted an old friend struggling with this huge and
heavy bundle as he walked. Dusk had come and
night was approaching. Your friend still had a long
march in front of him before he touches his doorstep.

So you stop to help. You fit him and the bundle into your car and detour from where you are going to take him home. Not only do you bring him home but you help him carry this heavy load into his house.

As you are helping him, he spots a thief heading for your car. You are so busy with his load on your back that you fail to notice your own present danger. However, your friend is afraid that by calling attention to the car, the thief might shift and attack him or take the bundle. Part of him is even jealous that you own a car and he doesn't, so secretly he relishes that you might soon fall into the same pedestrian predicament as him.

Thus, your friend keeps his eyes open but his mouth shut. The thief makes due with your car as you sweat and toil to introduce the load into your friend's house. You return to the street, only to find your car gone.

In your state of bewilderment, this friend hands you some naira, tells you where to find an okada then goes inside his house, so that he can unwrap the bundle which you helped him with. In your bewilderment, you actually thank him for the money and walk in the darkness of night to find your way home.

I say to you that whoever does such a thing to such a helpful person is a bad friend but a great fraud.

A true friend would draw your attention to the danger. A true friend would join effort with you so that neither your car nor his bundle are taken. If worse came to worse a true friend would have surrendered his bundle of lesser value so you could keep your thing of greater value.

As a representative of the United States Government, I stand before you as this type of friend. I came here to sound a warning that as you and Nigeria journey on the road to democracy there are those who will want to hijack your destiny from you. I came here to let you know that America stands beside the people of Nigeria as you walk their road. You do not walk alone. I stand before you as the type

of friend who wants Nigeria to understand and soberly accept its profound responsibilities to itself and because of its undisputed role as a regional leader, to its neighbors. A friend who wants Nigeria to establish itself as a citadel of prosperity, justice, peace and hope for its citizens and the rest of Africa.

A friend who hopes Nigeria will take its rightful place in the community of nations as an exemplar of the good that can be harvested from the African soil and the greatness that can come from and be established on the African continent.

Yet to get to that exalted position, Nigeria must change some of the ways and behavior to which it has become accustomed.

Here I will make some uncomfortable statements. I say them not to make you uncomfortable. I say them with the knowledge for those of you who truly care about Nigeria; you already should feel uncomfortable about some of the trends in the political arena.

I have not come here to spit fire at you. What I say is not even the smoke from the fire. What it is is just the alarm that confirms to you the fire you thought you saw is indeed real and threatening.

Now before I begin to tell you what I am here to say let me tell what I am not here to say. I am not here to speak in elegant language. The day is too

short and too many hours have already slipped away for such finery. We have no time to spend on subtle phrases that leave you guessing about what I said. My language will be plain and straightforward so that there can be no mistake about what I have said and what I have meant.

There will be no double or hidden meaning so subtract nothing from what I say. Neither add to it. What is said shall be no more and no less than what you hear. Likewise do not speculate that my presence is anything other than it is – to speak on good governance.

I am not here to favor or oppose any person, group or organization. I am here not to condemn or commend any particular person or party.

Thus if you are looking for whom I support, don't go to the Governor's mansion. You won't find me there. Don't go to the State Assembly building. You likewise won't find the answer there. Don't go to any party headquarters. My footprints will not be there. I am singularly disinterested in who beats whom in the political game. What has my abiding interest is that government look after the well being of those who do not have the capacity to fully look after their selves.

Thus, if you want to see whom we support, get out of your chair, walk out of this hall and go to the

schools to see young children struggling in poorly kept school houses to obtain an education that will give them hope for the future.

Go to marketplace. See the somber mother with too many needs to meet but too little money with which to meet them. Go to the farms. See people working and tilling the soil from sun up to sun down in order to scratch a living, to feed their family and feed their nation. Go to the bus stops. See the men and women who wake up tired early in the morning and come home even more-weary from work late at night. These are the people I support.

These are the people form the backbone of Nigeria. As they hope for democracy and its

dividends to improve their lives they are also the hope of democracy. Ultimately they are the ones who must team up with socially conscious leaders to put the political system in better order.

However, right now too many misdeeds by those seeking office are being hatched. Some of these misadventures are so severe that they should never have been contemplated let alone been committed. For example, assassination attempts against the lives of several political figures should make you shudder. Upheaval in your very state, Anambra, has to threaten to turn this once proud place completely on its head.

Anambra needs to learn a lesson from the affluent man who built himself a fine house with grand

things inside. As always, success is watched by envious eyes. Little did he know his every move was watched. Even those who watched him did not know there were others also engaged in this sinister vocation.

One evening the man let his watchman go to visit a relative, only to remember that he himself had promised a sick friend that he would visit him that night. Convincing himself the trek would be brief and his return swift, he soon departed. Not long after he drove out of view, a group of men emerged from the bush to steal into his house. They intended to quickly leave with whatever they could carry. Captivated by the opulence of the home, they sat down and began to eat and drink of his food and wine.

Just then another thief spied upon the house. Seeing the men in merriment, he mistook them for the owner's relatives. This thief had waited too long to rob the place. His patience sorely tested, he was going to steal that night. He connived to start a fire at the corner of the house, believing the relatives would rush to extinguish the flames.

Amid the confusion, he would spirit into the bedroom and claim the man's valuables. He set his plan in motion. The other men sensing the fire fled from the house, but being intruders themselves, had no desire to save the dwelling. They fled until they entered the embrace of the cover of darkness. The lone thief once in the bedroom saw so many good

things he became confused. Time passed as he decided on what to steal. Unconcerned by its author's confoundedness, the fire burned relentlessly. When his senses finally returned and he filled his robber's sack, it was too late. Fate had intervened. The entire house was ablaze. He could not escape. The fire he had started consumed him.

When the owner returned home he found no home. All was ember, ash and smoke. What had been was no longer.

Now, Anambra State should learn and not make the mistake committed by our unfortunate friend. To those well meaning and peace loving people of Anambra, don't allow your innate kindness and

trusting spirit become a vulnerability exploited by those who have no plans to do kindness unto you. Elections are coming.

These will determine whether you put your fortunes and futures in the hands of able custodians or in the hands of those who will burn and bury your inheritance. It is neither my place nor my intention to tell you for whom you should vote. You know the candidates better than I do. The only thing I can tell is that you should not just vote for a candidate. You should cast your vote for the well being of Anambra, you should vote for the betterment of yourselves.

In a country and a state with so much talent and resources, politics should be a vocation of innovation,

an avenue of cumulative advance as Nigeria and Anambra stack progress upon earlier progress. Right now, however, the terms “the politics of disorder and the disorder of politics” can be used interchangeably to describe too much of what has been taking place across this land and this State.

In the best sense of the word, politics is supposed to order society for the better. The political system is supposed to be a venue where problems get solved equitably so that society and all of its component parts can progress in relative harmony. However, it seems that politics has mutated into its opposite. Instead of a way of solving problems, politics has become a problem unto itself. Instead of improving people’s lives, it now claims lives.

A cloud of violence has descended over this house called Nigeria. For many months, it seems that the cloud has found its home of homes right over your fair state. It is time to chase the cloud away.

People are scrambling to and fro, pushing from pillar to post, joining and leaving one political party after another as they jockey for position and office. A lot of activity is taking place. Cunning tactics and strategies are being employed by political godfathers, godsons and even political orphans.

Many people scrambling to get in office or scheming to get someone else out. All of this is the gist of politics. It is to be expected but not exalted.

More sadly, is the fact that too many people are attempting to push politics into even darker reaches. Attacks on political rivals, destruction of private and public property, rioting, and the promotion and funding of gangs and militias.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not a naïve idealist. Politics is a tough game. Politicians must often do things that would make a saint blush. However, there is a great difference between being tough and being wrong. People who are too eager and too prone to engage in violence and intimidation should not be trusted with the public welfare. Putting a wolf in charge of a flock of sheep in no way turns him into a shepherd. It only makes for a most unfortunate flock of sheep.

While all the political wrangling is taking place, there is barely a peep about the art of serving the citizens, and what must be done once in office. There is a near universal muteness among the political office-seekers and those who cheer them for defining why they seek office. And it is this question heretofore left unanswered that is most important to the welfare of society. Thus, it is to that question we direct ourselves.

The real issue is why does one take part in the drama of politics?

Being in politics for the sake of politics is selfish. It is barest expression of ambition. One should only

engage in politics if one seeks to move to a more elevated and productive plane – that of governance. Electoral politics is seasonal. Governance is perpetual. Electoral politics is a personal endeavor while governance is a public trust that implies public service.

A politician who is not capable of governance is like a new car without an engine. While the car looks good, it gets you nowhere. Thus, we should ask all potential politicians, “Are you a politician because you have something to contribute or are you involved because you are looking for something to take away. Are you there because you like the sound of the title and because the sound of sirens has become an intoxicant to your ears?”

Or are you seeking office so that you can help the old lady receive her pension, help the young man find work to feed his family their daily bread and because you feel an unequalled exhilaration when you see healthy, well fed children smile as they walk, books in hand, on their way to school.

Now that the election season is upon us, we all have a choice to make. Will our politics be small and selfish or will it be visionary and will it be beneficial to those whom we purport to serve?

These are the questions before us all. These questions are freighted with importance. Thus, may

we answer them with all the wisdom that we humanly and humanely can summons.

Because Nigeria is a new democracy, your responsibility to hold credible elections and to bring good governance to your people is acute. You may not face any greater collective responsibility for the remainder of your life.

When a democracy is young, substandard, flawed elections or a period of poor governance can give a mortal blow to the democratic experiment. The process of democratization is not much different than the growth of a human being. Hardship an adult can endure may be fatal to a small child.

● You, as leaders of your state and communities, are the appointed guardians of this precious child, Nigeria's democracy. Like any decent parent, you must place the survival and well being of that child above your own narrow interests. No decent parent feeds himself yet forces his child to starve.

Here I will say something that at first seems to contradict what I have said before. Listen carefully so you get the full impact and import of what I will say. "Nigeria's history indicates that it can survive without democracy".

However, history – and the large gulf that separates Nigeria's reality from its potential – is conclusive proof that Nigeria as a country cannot

flourish without political democracy and the economic empowerment that democracy implies. This thing called democracy is a complex, and at times, an ungainly animal. From afar, it looks like an inefficient form of governance; but up close, it is the most practical one.

Under an undemocratic system, it is easier to render and implement decisions. One person or a cabal say yes or no, do or don't. Matters are settled with lightning speed. The minute a despot speaks, the matter is over.

Over time, this type of government leads to arbitrariness malfeasance. With government of such

a closed nature, you reap only the twilight of your future.

On the other hand, constitutional democracy and its associated checks and balances are the best form of government because they recognize the flaws in the human character. If we were all saints, government would be unnecessary. No, democracy does not work because we are angels and saints. It is necessary because it is the form of government that best restrains the demon in us all. That demon goes by many names – ambition, greed, self-interest are just a few names.

Just having the democratic forms and institutions are inadequate in themselves. The people with whom

these institutions are entrusted must contain the values of democracy in their hearts and minds. A constitution is but a piece of paper. And no matter how fine the paper and how special the words inscribed therein, that paper can be easily shred.

The real constitution that begets good governance is not found on any paper, it is etched in the spirit and thoughts of living men and women. What I am saying is that for the constitution to be real and genuine it must be written in your mind, your heart, your behavior.

For good governance and democracy to take hold, the answers to two questions, "Why do you run for office" and "Why will the people elect you" must be

the same. Dissatisfaction and trouble reign wherever the answers are different. If you ran for office because you wanted to enrich yourself but the people elected you because they thought you would bring better social services, someone will be disappointed. Something has to yield in this situation because you cannot serve two masters – you must either serve them or yourself.

Either you will have to change your ways or they will have to accept your self-aggrandizement but both cannot get what they want. Where there is such a fundamental discord between the elected official and the electorate, contention will be your portion. Conversely, where there is general harmony of

interests, you have established the essential foundation for good governance.

You as political leaders in the state can and must be the primary example of good governance to the people. The people may not always be in contact with national officials, but, if you do your work properly, you must be in close contact with your community. By doing your jobs, you not only become the best exemplar of grassroots democracy you become democracy's protector.

In order to serve this vital function, you must have a vision for your state. If you do not have a vision for improving or serving your community, you should seriously think about pursuing another

vocation. This one may not be for you. Of course, state and local government cannot do everything but you must work with and for the people to bring them the vital services within your mandate to deliver.

What the people need from you is not shrouded in mystery. It is easy to discern their needs and concerns provided you care enough about those who elected you. They are looking for improvement in health care for their families, education for their children, better infrastructure, economic growth and employment – food.

Move around your state and community, take time to express your vision for improving it to your people, let them express their ideas and concerns to

you. Listen to their cries. Some of their ideas will be good, don't tarry in accepting these ideas.

Embrace their good ideas to refine and improve your thinking and your programs. Accepting someone else's ideas is not weakness. It is wisdom. If you do follow this track, your supporters will continue to give you support. Those who once opposed you, will begin to think better about you. Those who hated you, will begin to respect you.

Just by listening with an open ear and honest heart, you have taken an important step toward good governance that uplifts the spirit and well being of the entire community.

In this regard, remember not to shun your political opposition. Do not mistake electoral politics for military warfare. These people are your political opposition not your mortal enemies. Only one person can win an election. But if the election is done fairly, we all stand to gain something from it.

However, if we turn elections into a form of warfare, there is no true winner or loser. We all shall suffer in the end. Even the so-called winner loses. Given the sharpness of the electoral warfare, the winner cannot quickly divorce himself from the combative spirit that governed during elections. Once a person gains power by any means, he becomes convinced that his opponent will try to steal that power by any means.

This type of victory is no victory at all. This type of psychology is not conducive to good governance. In such a situation, a man sleeps with one eye open and one foot on the floor. No matter how high or soft the bed, no one can find comfort in such a position. Thus, it is best to make peace after the elections and the best way to make peace after the election is never to engage in the type of warfare before the election.

Remember that your political opponents are human beings with brains and reason. They cannot be wrong on all issues all the time no more than you can be right all the time. Your opponents are entitled to respect and dignity. Listen to them, give them

adequate political and economic space. Do not starve or humiliate them.

You are on top today but nothing constructed by man is permanent. The situation will change. Better you treat a man well when you could have injured him. When that man rises to power, your previous treatment of him will put you in good stead on the day you plead for mercy. Treating others justly when you have the power to do otherwise is your best insurance for fair treatment should power ever be taken from you.

Now let's look at the other side of the electoral equation, the person who gets fewer votes. It is equally important. Of course, if you have a legitimate

grip about the vote tabulation, pursue that grievance through legal channels. That is your right and duty.

However, if and when it has been genuinely established that you lose, you must accept defeat gracefully. You have lost the election but have not been banished from the human race. All is not forsaken. You still have an important role to play. The more you play it wisely is the better you position yourself for the subsequent election. The thing to do is not to try to undermine everything your opponent does.

For now, he has a constitutional mandate that must be respected. To actively and on all accounts undermine him, is to disrespect that mandate. It is to

disrespect the constitution which, while the election was pending, you had promised to serve with all your heart down to the last drop of your blood. Before the election, honey flowed from your tongue. Now that you lost, you spit acid. Which one are you? The correct answer is that you should be neither.

You should be clear-headed about your chances before the election. You should be calm and composed no matter the outcome. As the leader of the opposition, you have a solemn duty. You should criticize the office holder when wrong but, in all fairness, you should not try to tear him down, for that office holder now represents the entire people. If you tear him down, you tear down a little of yourself. Criticize, yes, destroy, no. Every now and then,

begrudgingly acknowledge and admit when he does something right. This is good politics. It is even better governance. Such a sign of maturity will win more points for you than any negative words you could say.

Both winners and losers, you must realize that although you might not be best friends you ought not be the bitterest foes. If both of you sought office to help the community and not just to help yourselves, there should be some common ground upon which you can meet and establish a decent relationship.

How to educate your populace, protect their health, create employment, take care of waste disposal, water management, power generation,

promote agriculture in terms of food security and commercial opportunities – all these things out to be addressed by those in office and those who seek office. If you busy yourself with addressing these issues, you have little time for violence and political misadventures.

I would like to encourage you not to conduct “business as usual”. State and local government have been accused of squandering money, I exhort you to show that, in your jurisdiction, malfeasance is not the case. State and local government have come under criticism for being ineffective. I exhort you to prove those critics wrong. It has been said that state and local government have not really touched the lives of the people. I ask you to make that criticism

false as it pertains to your stewardship of your local government.

Look, if you try to improve and change things, some people will oppose you. That is to be expected. The reason you were elected to office was not to have an easy time but to bring positive change. I exhort you to do so. That is your mandate. Let that be your legacy.

In Nigeria, democracy is being put to the test. Can it perform? In this contest there are no neutrals. There are no fence sitters. Either you are working to promote democracy or you are doing things to defeat and undermine it. I beseech you to be on the right side of this historic battle.

As I go I leave you with this parable. A wealthy man had twelve sons and a large estate that stretched as far as the eye could see in all four directions. Upon this estate, he set about building fine houses and demarcating large plots. He managed to build eleven beautiful homes with splendid gardens. However, he grew old and tired and could work no more on this project. Seeing the old man grow weak, the first eleven sons rushed to occupy the houses.

With the money their father gave them, they bought new cars, fine clothes, the best watches, drank aged whiskey and exquisite wine. Every week, the man would invite his sons to his home for a meal.

Every week the first eleven would sit at the table, filling themselves on the feast their father had provided for them.

During one of these sessions, the old man suddenly asks "Where is my son?" The older responded, "Why ask such a question? We are all here". The older son than turned to the next saying, "He can't see us. The old man is losing his sight". At the following week's meal, the old man again asked the same question to which the oldest son responds, "Why ask that again, old man. Your sons are here. Do you want 11 answers?" The old man then replied, "Did your mother give birth to only 11?" The son said, "Why are you worried about that little ingrate? He never comes when you invite him, he has not sat at

this table in years. It is a good thing you did not give him a house. See how badly he behaves?" The old man laughs. "So you call yourselves my sons. You are no more my son than the chair you sit on. No, your parents are greed and meanness. You sit in the big houses, living off the fruit of another's labor and you call what you are doing work. It is not even play. It's pillage. You produce nothing, yet consume everything. Do you know where the food you eat here every week comes from? Who plants and harvests it? Do you know?

There is a person who for years has come here early in the day to prepare these weekly meals in the kitchen. After you leave, he cleans the mess you made. This person is the one who took the vacant

land and turned it into a vast farm. Yet, you do not know this because you never cared enough to go and see what became of that land. It is that person who I want to see now. So I ask again – where is my son,” the old man shouts.

Finally, the twelfth boy comes running from the kitchen. “Father, Father what is troubling you?” “Not “what”, but “who” is troubling me, the old man corrects him. The old man goes on to say, “Do you see these eleven who eat off the fat of the land yet contribute nothing. They are what trouble me. They sit here and gorge themselves yet hover over me like vultures waiting for me to expire so they can lay claim to what they did not work for. They did not know the food they eat, you planted, you harvested, you brought to

the house, you even cooked so they could enjoy it.

Yet, all they have to say about you is calamity and lies.

I have helped give birth to twelve yet I have but only one son. The rest have sold themselves and are now slaves to their own endless appetites. From today forward, everything I own is yours, including the houses and cars these scoundrels enjoy. As for them, do with them what you will, except never turn your back to them. The day you do so is the day a knife enters your spine.” With that, the old man leaves the dining hall after instructing the twelfth son to take his seat at the head of the table.

Now imagine that the old man represents the will of the people and judgment of history, the houses and food represent the wealth and resources of the nation, and the twelfth son represents one type of politician while the other sons represent another type of political leader. Which son would you want to be? This is the hour in which to make your choice.

Thank you.